



Paying Attention to the Road

AAA and the DOT
Tackle Distracted Driving

Two seconds. That's how long it takes for crash risk to double if a driver looks away from the road for any reason.

Considering the fact that nearly two out of three motorists readily admit to driving while distracted, there's no question among experts about the safety threat distracted driving poses. And now the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and AAA are making it a top priority.

Both have launched campaigns to combat distracted driving in the last year. AAA has mounted a national advocacy effort to enact bans on texting while driving in all 50 states, and the DOT has launched an unprecedented campaign to focus public safety, law enforcement, and government and media attention on the issue. The two organizations, along with a host of other advocates and organizations, want to reduce crashes and save lives by stopping motorists from engaging in dangerous and distracting behavior.

→ Raising Awareness

"It's an all-out campaign," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, who last fall hosted the DOT's first Distracted Driving Summit to explore solutions. The two-day event in Washington, DC, included other government officials, wireless and automotive industry representatives, traffic safety researchers, distracted driving crash victims and their families, and advocates such as AAA and the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

Even President Obama weighed-in on the issue by banning federal employees

from using cell phones or texting while driving. "The President really kicked it off with his executive order telling federal employees not to text or use government-issued cell phones or BlackBerry devices while driving government-owned vehicles," LaHood said. "We've tried to continue the momentum with our activities."

AAA also has ramped up its public and legislative outreach efforts to help combat the threat of distracted driving. Last October, AAA and the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety launched the inaugural "Heads Up Driving Week," urging motorists to put away distractions and focus only on the road. AAA's web page for the promotion, AAAFoundation.org/HeadsUp, includes an online pledge and tips on how to avoid distraction.

Prior to the 2009 DOT Summit, AAA announced a legislative campaign to enact laws banning texting while driving in all 50 states. AAA clubs have been instrumental in passing texting bans around the country, and more than half of all states now ban drivers from text messaging while driving.

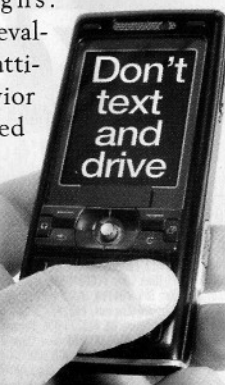
Driver distraction is a problem as old as the automobile itself. In the last decade, "high-tech" distractions such as text messaging and the use of cell phones and other handheld devices have become a contributing factor in a significant number of crashes and garnered a lot more attention from safety advocates. Driver distraction is dangerous because it

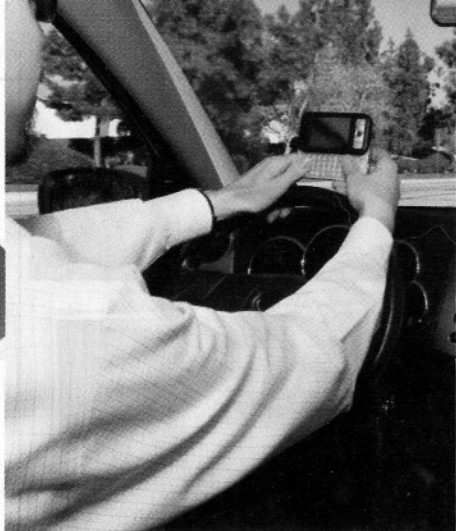
can divert a driver's eyes from the road, his or her hands from the steering wheel, and his or her concentration off of the task of driving. Text messaging can do all three, which is why it is one of the most dangerous things a driver can do.

→ Enforcement Is Key

Having a law in place can positively influence driving behavior, but that may not stop some motorists from continuing to put others at risk. Recent AAA research regarding effectiveness of texting bans suggests the importance of enforcement to the success of laws.

DOT officials agree that provisions are needed to maintain a high level of deterrence. "I think laws are good, but good enforcement is even better," said LaHood, who in April announced two high-visibility distracted-driving enforcement pilot programs in Hartford and Syracuse. The pilots are modeled after well-established national and local drunken driving and seat belt enforcement campaigns. Researchers will evaluate changes in attitudes and behavior towards distracted





Safety Matters

AAA continues to be a leading advocate for highway safety and works on legislative issues that address today's unique hazards. Texting and talking on a cell phone while driving have become a dangerous epidemic, costing thousands of lives a year. According to the National Highway Traffic Administration (NHTSA)*, 5,870 people lost their lives and another 515,000 were injured because of distractions while driving.



**per 2008 study*

driving before and after the campaign to determine which enforcement strategies are most effective.

It seems that despite the danger, some people are inclined to continue texting while driving. Indeed, ongoing research by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has shown that while an overwhelming number of motorists recognize the hazards of texting while driving, a significant percentage continue to engage in the practice.

AAA has suggested that what is needed is a change in traffic safety culture—people's attitudes toward safe driving. An example of this is how public attitudes toward alcohol-impaired driving have changed in the last several decades thanks to tough laws, strong enforcement and the work of traffic safety advocates. "When I was growing up, people turned a blind eye to drunken driving," LaHood said. "Even police, if they stopped somebody who was drunk while driving, they'd give them a pat on the back and send them home in their car, call a taxi for them, or maybe even transport them home in their police car. None of that happens anymore."

→ Driver Distraction in 2015

So where do AAA and federal transportation officials go from here? Cultural and individual behavioral change has proven to be a gradual process, so the issue will require a long-term approach.

"We won't be all the way there, but I think as a result of what AAA is doing—as a result of what a lot of people are doing—awareness will be raised, laws

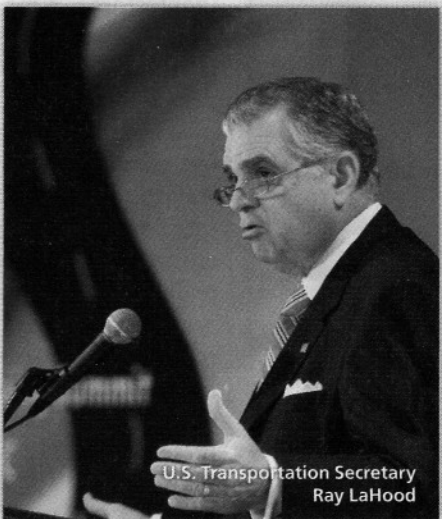
will be enforced, and people will realize they can't drive safely while using a cell phone or texting," LaHood predicted. "We won't have cured everybody, but we will have made a lot of progress."

AAA clubs across the nation already are planning for legislative advocacy in 2011 sessions to continue working toward enacting texting while driving bans in all 50 states. If the current legislative trend continues, AAA expects continued success in its legislative campaign.

→ A Unified Front

AAA and the DOT share the common goal of keeping America's motorists safe and eliminating dangerous driving behaviors. AAA will continue to collaborate with the DOT and other safety and industry leaders to help prevent distracted driving.

"If we can educate and enlighten people, we're going to make progress," LaHood said. "What AAA does helps us make progress." *GP*



U.S. Transportation Secretary
Ray LaHood